United Nations A/59/581–S/2004/925

General Assembly
Security Council

Distr.: General
26 November 2004

Original: English

General Assembly
Fifty-ninth session
Agenda items 27 and 39 (d)

The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security

Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: emergency international assistance for peace, normalcy and reconstruction of war-stricken Afghanistan

Security Council
Fifty-ninth year

The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security

Emergency international assistance for peace, normalcy and reconstruction of war-stricken Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report describes the progress made with regard to the implementation of the Bonn Agreement by the Transitional Administration, with assistance of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. It also describes key political and humanitarian developments in Afghanistan from 1 December 2003 to 22 November 2004.

The report highlights the achievement of two key milestones of the Bonn Agreement: the approval of the new Constitution by the Constitutional Loya Jirga and the holding of the presidential election. While these two events represent major advances towards the building of a democratic Afghanistan, the report also notes with concern the continuing instability and insecurity in the country.

The report emphasizes that considerable challenges remain before the holding of the parliamentary elections scheduled for spring 2005, including progress in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, counter-narcotics activities and security-sector reform, and that continued engagement by the international community, in particular the provision of sufficient security, is critical.

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The rehabilitation of the education system, refugee repatriation and relief, recovery and reconstruction efforts by the United Nations, with an emphasis on supporting the Government's development plan, continued during the reporting period. The human rights situation remains of serious concern.

The general success of the electoral process showed the determination of the Afghan people to have democratic government. However, the agenda facing the newly elected Government is significant. The report concludes that continued and further support by the international community will be necessary to fulfil the letter and the spirit of the Bonn Agreement.

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 58/27 A and B of 5 December 2003 and Security Council resolution 1536 (2004) of 26 March 2004. The report provides a summary of key political and humanitarian developments in Afghanistan as well as of the activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) from 1 December 2003 to 22 November 2004. The issues covered in the report are described in more detail in the periodic reports to the General Assembly and Security Council submitted during 2004 (A/58/742-S/2004/230 and A/58/868-S/2004/634).

II. Implementation of the Bonn Agreement

A. The political process

2. The Bonn Agreement of 5 December 2001 mapped out a process whereby provisional governing institutions would gradually increase in legitimacy, culminating in a fully representative Government after the holding of free and fair elections. The legitimacy of the Government would be rooted in a new Constitution. During the period under review, two major tasks of the Bonn Agreement were successfully completed: the approval of the new Constitution by the Constitutional Loya Jirga in January 2004 and the holding of the presidential election in October 2004.

Constitutional reform

3. The process of drafting the new Constitution began in November 2002 and continued through most of 2003 (see A/58/616, para. 8). The Constitutional Loya Jirga was convened in Kabul on 10 December 2003 to finalize and ratify the draft Constitution. A total of 502 delegates attended, of whom 20 per cent were women. On 4 January 2004, the delegates approved the new Constitution.

4. A central feature of the Constitutional Loya Jirga was that many positions on issues seemed to be decided on a regional or ethnic basis. Positions on issues such as the nationality of ministers, the timing of the elections and the national language, came down to either a political or a symbolic context, and sometimes both, between representatives from the north and those from the south. The role of Islam was the subject of another important debate, this time between fundamentalists and more secular-minded Afghans. The final text agreed to bear the imprint of these debates. It provides for a pure presidential system, but one that places a great emphasis on parliamentary control of the executive. The Constitution vests most powers in the central Government and does not devolve much authority to the provinces. It also calls for an independent judiciary, headed by a Supreme Court, and a legal framework that is consistent with the "beliefs and prescriptions" of Islam. In an important measure to advance national unity, the Constitution explicitly includes all minority groups in the definition of the nation and recognizes Dari and Pashto as official languages, and other languages as official in the area where the majority speaks them. The Constitution provides equal rights to men and women and guarantees that women will make up at least 25 per cent of the representatives in the lower house of parliament.

Election process

5. The Bonn Agreement called for elections to be held in June 2004 — or two years after the convening of the Emergency Loya Jirga — and also requested the United Nations to carry out a voter registration exercise. The latter occurred in two phases, the first between December 2003 and April 2004 and the second between May and August 2004. In the first phase, 1.9 million voters were registered in the eight main urban centres. The second phase, in which registration teams were extended to provincial capitals and rural areas, resulted in the registration of a further 8.6 million Afghans. At the end of registration, 41 per cent of the 10.5 million registered voters were women.

6. On 8 July, the Chairman of the United Nations-Afghan Joint Electoral Management Body — the independent commission mandated to conduct and supervise Afghanistan's electoral process — formally announced that the presidential election would be held on 9 October and parliamentary elections would be held in the Afghan month of Saur (20 April-20 May) 2005. While legal and technical difficulties provided a sufficient case for delaying and separating the elections, the Joint Electoral Management Body also noted widespread concern in Afghanistan about the lack of disarmament and the fear that this could prejudice the conduct and outcome of the parliamentary elections. It therefore called upon the Government and the international community to continue and intensify, ahead of the presidential and parliamentary elections, their efforts to strengthen the national armed forces and achieve broader disarmament, in order to create a safer environment for candidates and voters to express themselves freely.

7. The presidential election, which was contested by 18 candidates, including one woman, was held on schedule on 9 October. Despite fears that the process might be attacked by anti-Government elements, no major security incidents occurred. A number of opposition candidates, however, raised serious allegations regarding the fairness of the process, including problems with the use of indelible ink to mark voters' thumbs and assertions of undue influence on voters by polling staff and candidates' representatives. Those opposition candidates issued an appeal midway through the polling for voters to boycott the ballot. The boycott was largely ignored by voters: 8,128,940 ballots were cast, representing 70 per cent of the registered voters. Forty per cent of voters were women. Polling also took place in Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran, where over 580,000 and 240,000 Afghan refugees, respectively, voted. The elections were followed by some 5,321 domestic and 121 international observers and monitors, 22,000 party agents and 52,000 agents of candidates, as well as national and international media.

8. In the days after the ballot most of the candidates who had called for a boycott continued to allege serious irregularities and called for the reopening of some polling centres and for their complaints to be investigated by an independent panel. While the Joint Electoral Management Body did not agree to the former, it did request UNAMA to nominate an independent panel of international electoral experts to investigate their complaints. The panel's report to the Joint Electoral Management Body, which was made public on 2 November, found that the irregularities observed did not have a material impact on the overall outcome of the election. President Karzai won the election with 55.4 per cent of the vote. He was followed by Yonous Qanooni, with 16.3 per cent, Haji Mohammad Mohaqeq, with 11.6 per cent, and Abdul Rashid Dostum, with 10 per cent. The remaining 14 candidates each received

less than 2 per cent of the votes, and collectively 6 per cent. The candidates agreed to accept the election results.

9. A preliminary analysis of the final results suggests that, as with the Constitutional Loya Jirga, the assertion of ethnic identity played an important role. Electoral support for the four main contenders, President Karzai, Mr. Qanooni, Mr. Dostum and Mr. Mohaqeq, strongly correlated with the rural areas where Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazaras are, respectively, the majority groups. Ethnic considerations, however, appeared to have had less impact in major cities. This may be attributable to the fact that, since ethnic identity was not exploited aggressively during the campaign, candidates were able to operate widely in capitals outside their core constituencies.

10. Planning for the parliamentary elections is under way, and careful account is being taken of the experience gained during the presidential election. The parliamentary elections are much more complex logistically and present formidable security concerns. A number of key issues must be resolved in order to hold the elections by spring 2005: boundaries of districts must be delineated; population figures must be agreed upon for the assignment of parliamentary seats; the list of voters must be analysed, refined and updated; a complaints mechanism and electoral offence prosecution system must be developed at the local level; and the qualifications of thousands of potential candidates must be vetted prior to their registration. Finally, the expansion of the formal security apparatus will be essential to the success of parliamentary and local elections.

11. At the same time, President-elect Karzai, whose inauguration is scheduled for December, is now focusing on the task of forming the next Government. It is an opportunity to select an effective Cabinet that is able to extend government authority throughout the country and deliver the basic services. A cabinet that is both competent and representative of the ethnic, cultural and geographical diversity of the country will be critical for advancing national reconciliation. The President and his Government will need to tackle, with the support of the international community, formidable challenges that include persistent insecurity, the endemic illicit narcotics industry and the consolidation of key State institutions.

B. Security

Overall security situation

12. In the months prior to election day and the deployment of additional security forces which took place in the final weeks before the elections, there was a build-up of serious security incidents. Some of these were directed against the electoral effort, but others were directed more generally against peace and reconstruction activities. On 10 June, 10 Chinese road workers were killed, the highest death toll suffered by non-combatant expatriates in a single incident in Afghanistan. The killing of five employees of Médecins sans frontières on 2 June was the worst attack against humanitarian workers since the fall of the Taliban, causing the organization to withdraw completely. On 12 September, following the decision by President Karzai to replace the Governor of Herat, Ismail Khan, several hundred protesters attacked and burned the UNAMA office in Herat and looted the offices of other United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations and the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission. The fact that these attacks occurred in

areas previously thought not to be at high risk was of serious concern. Similarly, security in the south and south-east deteriorated to the point where large areas were effectively out of bounds to the assistance community, and government officials were frequent targets of attacks. There were real concerns over the impact that this obvious deterioration of the security situation might have on the credibility of the elections. Significant extraordinary measures were therefore taken to safeguard the election.

13. The generally calm security environment on election day was due in part to the additional International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and coalition troops deployed before the election. The cooperation, planning and support provided by these forces was exceptional, and this indicates that they should remain in Afghanistan for the parliamentary and local elections. Security was also greatly enhanced by progress made in the training and deployment of the Afghan army and police forces, which performed extremely well on election day, whether in protecting polling stations, deterring threats or escorting election materials.

14. In the aftermath of the election, and with a reduction in the coalition and ISAF forces, three broad security threats continue to effect the Bonn process: (a) extremist or terrorist attacks, (b) factional violence among militia forces and (c) violence and other threats to human security by criminal elements, in particular those involved in the trafficking of drugs. This reality was tragically borne out by a suicide bombing in the centre of Kabul on 23 October, in which two people lost their lives. A few days later, on 28 October, three international electoral staff were abducted in the Kart-e-Parwan district of Kabul in broad daylight. As a result, additional security measures have been taken to enhance the safety of staff — the most stringent measures since 2001. The abducted staff were subsequently released on 22 November.

15. Without substantial progress in addressing the sources of insecurity, reconstruction efforts and the establishment of viable State institutions will continue to falter, and the economy may well be subsumed by the illicit-drugs industry. The deployment now of additional international forces, with robust and uniform rules of engagement, can provide the critical space in which progress can be made in the mutually reinforcing areas of security-sector reform, anti-narcotics activities, reconstruction, expansion of government authority and imposition of the rule of law.

Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration

16. The disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process, supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and under the leadership of Japan, began in October 2003. It has two major components: the demobilization of soldiers from existing military units and the cantonment of heavy weapons. Participants in the Berlin conference of April 2004 resolved to demobilize at least 40 per cent of the 100,000 targeted soldiers and to canton all heavy weapons prior to the elections.

17. While these targets were not met prior to the election, the electoral process itself appeared to have a positive effect on disarmament. For example, a provision in the electoral law stated that candidates could not register to vote if they maintained connections with armed militias. Hence, the Central government appointed commanders from within the structure of militias that were linked to aspiring candidates. The Ministry of Justice, in accordance with the political party law, also

refused to register groups with known links to armed factions. This provided a further incentive to decommission militia units.

18. To accelerate demobilization and disarmament, in July 2004 the President issued a decree identifying additional units to be demobilized prior to the elections and instructing the Ministries of Defence and Finance to begin to apply financial sanctions in cases of non-compliance. By the end of September an additional 5,480 soldiers had entered the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme, beyond the 15,355 that had been disarmed before the decree was issued. Over 20,000 soldiers have begun the process of reintegration.

19. The issue of irregular militias also needs to be addressed. These are armed groups that are not on the payroll of the Ministry of Defence, and hence not included in the ongoing disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme. But these groups are increasingly responsible for insecurity in many parts of Afghanistan. The Government, together with the international community in Kabul, is examining the means to dismantle these groups through weapons collection and community development programmes.

Afghan national army

20. The Afghan National Army, which is being formed under the lead of the United States of America, assisted by France, has grown to approximately 15,000 trained personnel, of which approximately 8,500 passed basic training during the review period. At full strength, it will consist of approximately 70,000 soldiers organized into five corps: the central corps in Kabul and four regional corps in Kandahar, Paktia, Herat and Balkh. The three brigades in the central corps are currently at full strength, with 15 battalions altogether. Plans are under way to develop the more technical elements of the corps, especially artillery, air defence and engineering. It is expected to take five to seven years to fully establish the regional corps. The process has begun, with four regional corps commanders and some of their key staff having been appointed on 1 September 2004. The Afghan National Army currently has 18 battalions deployed around the country on security and "show of force" tasks.

21. The main accomplishment of the Afghan National Army over the past year was the provision of security for the presidential election. It was an integral part of the nationwide security plan and played a major role in the search for improvised explosive devices before polling stations opened, in securing roads and as a visible quick-reaction force. In addition, it was primarily responsible for the security of the regional counting stations. Throughout the election the soldiers were highly visible and technically proficient and were able to secure the cooperation of Afghans in locating and neutralizing improvised explosive devices, rocket-launching areas and potential ambush sites.

22. The Afghan National Army also provided security, in isolated cases, for the mobile disarmament units conducting the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme. In addition, it was instrumental in separating the forces of Ismail Khan and his opponents, Amanullah Khan (Shindand) and Zahir Khan (Qala-e-Naw), in western Afghanistan during the conflict in August 2004, when it deployed two battalions to the area at short notice, where they provided a buffer between the belligerent forces to allow negotiations to continue.

Police reform

23. Training, staffing and sustaining an effective police force is a vital element of assuring security and the rule of law in Afghanistan. This task, undertaken under the lead of Germany, has proved to be challenging. The existing police force continues to suffer from a lack of well-trained officers, appropriate equipment and effective command structures. A number of important initiatives were taken to address these concerns. Five regional training centres were established across the country, in addition to the German-supported Police Academy and the United States-led Central Training Centre in Kabul. As of mid-October, 2,624 personnel had been trained at the Kabul Police Academy. These included 1,831 non-commissioned officers, of which 55 were female, and 752 border police. In addition, 27,200 police received basic police training through United States Government-supported programmes. The projected strength of the police force is 50,000, plus 12,000 border guards.

24. At the Doha conference on police reconstruction, held on 18 and 19 May 2004, co-hosted by the Governments of Afghanistan, Germany and Qatar and the United Nations, participants pledged $350 million for police programmes over the next few years. The UNDP-administered Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan (LOTFA), which pays for police salaries and equipment, currently suffers from a financing shortfall of $72.6 million.

25. The Afghan police force proved itself during the electoral process despite its limited means. Police, who were provided with specific electoral training, accompanied registration teams to ensure their security and provide order during registration. Police also guarded polling sites on election day and, along with the Afghan National Army, formed the first line of defence against those who might have attacked the election process.

Justice reform

26. The process of reforming the justice sector, led by Italy, is based on two complementary efforts: strengthening political will and providing financial and technical assistance. The general assessment of the justice sector is that there is weak management and communication among justice institutions, and this needs to be addressed by coordination at all levels. The absence of implementing legislation for organizing the justice system compounds these problems. In addition, after 25 years of war, the justice sector lacks the required number of skilled staff, and there is a real need to build the capacities of existing justice-sector staff.

27. Under the new Constitution the Supreme Court is the highest judicial organ in Afghanistan, and its structure and administration are well defined. The physical facilities of the permanent justice institutions, including the Supreme Court, the Attorney General's office and the Ministry of Justice, are currently undergoing rehabilitation with support from UNDP.

28. Legal education reform, also supported by UNDP, is a crucial step for ensuring a new generation of judicial staff. Two legal education systems exist in parallel: the Faculty of Law and Political Studies, following the old French model, and the Faculty of the Shariah. Both have very old curricula that have not been revised over the past 25 years. Future actions include setting up a board of experts to work closely with the Ministry of Higher Education; the enhancement of teaching and research capacities; the creation of new linkages with foreign academic institutions;

the rehabilitation of physical infrastructure (justice facilities in six provinces, including Kabul, are being rehabilitated); and the establishment or improvement of law libraries.

29. Complementary to the justice reform effort is the rehabilitation of the correctional system, supported by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. A key reform was the transfer of prison administration from the Ministry of Interior to the Ministry of Justice. A draft penitentiary law finalized by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime is currently under review by the Ministry of Justice. The Office has also begun the rehabilitation of the detention and prison facilities in Kabul and selected provinces so that they meet international standards.

30. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime has also been providing advisory services and legislative assistance for ratifying and implementing the 12 universal instruments against terrorism. Assistance has been provided in reviewing and drafting the relevant national legislation, and training activities are being undertaken to facilitate their practical implementation.

Counter-narcotics activities

31. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime *Opium Survey 2004* indicates that opium cultivation increased by two thirds this year, reaching an unprecedented 131,000 hectares and taking place in all provinces. Bad weather and disease, however, lowered the opium yield per hectare, resulting in an output of 4,200 tons — an increase of "only" 17 per cent. Afghanistan remains the world's largest opium producer, accounting for 75 per cent of global production. In 2003, the domestic value of the crop in Afghanistan was about $2 billion to $3 billion (or an estimated 68 per cent of the gross domestic product), while its value on the world market was about $30 billion to $60 billion.

32. Due to excess supply, opium prices in 2004 are 67 per cent lower than they were last year. Stable heroin prices at border crossings are likely the result of law enforcement, which has made it more difficult for traffickers to refine drugs and smuggle them across the country.

33. Economic dependency on poppy cultivation, limited law enforcement resources, corruption and the lack of an effective institutional framework for drug control add to the complexity of the situation. Narcotics are becoming an increasing threat to national security, social stability and governmental effectiveness. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland has taken the lead role in addressing this particularly difficult issue.

34. There are three key elements involved in eliminating the poppy economy and its deleterious effect on Afghanistan's political and reconstruction processes. First, the international community must assist the Government of Afghanistan in its interdiction efforts. If vigorously pursued, these efforts will substantively decrease the drug trade in the coming few years. Participating in interdiction will strengthen the Afghan Government's counter-narcotics institutions. At the same time, the Government must be assisted in strengthening its institutional capacity to arrest, investigate, try and imprison serious criminal offenders. Second, local economies must be supported through the provision of licit on-farm income-generating opportunities and the establishment of larger-scale infrastructure and industrial projects to provide non-farm income opportunities. Third, the link between the

disarmament, demobilization and reintegration effort and counter-narcotics activities must be addressed. Ex-combatants resisting disarmament, demobilization and reintegration continue to have significant resources and power because of the illicit drug trade, which enables them to influence government institutions, thereby overriding the existing rule of law.

35. Dismantling the opium economy will require, therefore, a combination of coercive measures and the instruments of democracy, rule of law and development. National efforts alone will not suffice. Afghanistan's cultivation and trafficking have ramifications for transit countries, just as habits in consumer countries provide incentives to maintain the opium economy, with all its deleterious effects, in Afghanistan. Therefore, additional efforts are also needed by countries through which Afghan opiates are trafficked and places where heroin abuse is a significant problem.

Provincial reconstruction teams and the International Security Assistance Force

36. The Provincial Reconstruction Team Working Group is the operational forum where the Government, donors, military forces and other civilian and military actors can discuss the management of civil-military issues. The non-governmental organization (NGO) Civil Military Group allows for direct dialogue between national and international NGOs and the military forces. These two structures are linked and report to the Provincial Reconstruction Team Executive Steering Committee, a high-level decision-making and consultative body that provides guidance to the management of provincial reconstruction teams and on how civilian and military actors interact within the framework of development and reconstruction.

37. Both ISAF and the coalition forces have planned the integration of provincial reconstruction team operations with the national priority programmes led by the Government of Afghanistan. Although there is a gap between plans and implementation, there is a commitment to ensure that the reconstruction work of the provincial reconstruction teams is carried out in agreement with Afghan authorities. There are currently 19 provincial reconstruction teams (15 coalition-forces teams in the south, south-east and west and four ISAF teams in the north). ISAF is planning the second stage of its expansion, which will cover the west of the country.

C. Social issues

Overall human rights situation

38. United Nations human rights activity continues to follow two connected tracks: technical cooperation to build the capacity of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission and a human rights component within UNAMA that undertakes monitoring and assists the development of the Commission, other national institutions and civil society. An important development has been the Government's commitment to implement and report on ratified human rights treaties and the establishment of human rights units in a number of ministries.

39. The United Nations independent expert on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Cherif Bassiouni, who conducted his initial mission to Afghanistan from 14 to 21 August 2004, expressed serious concerns about the human rights

situation. Mr. Bassiouni identified a number of priority issues for immediate action, mostly concerning conditions of detention (especially with regard to women and children); the illegal nature of the detention of 725 detainees transferred from Shibergan to Kabul a few months ago (and subsequently released); the lack of transparency in and the question of the legality of the detention of Afghan civilians by the coalition forces; the abduction and trafficking of children; and the need to address the continuing impunity of human rights violators, particularly local commanders.

40. There are continuing reports of trafficking, kidnapping and smuggling of children, and their subsequent deportation from the countries of destination. Children further risk being rejected by their families once they return to their places of origin. The Government has begun to address the problem and, with technical support from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs took a leading role in bringing together various ministries to formulate a national plan of action on combating child trafficking.

Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission

41. Throughout the past year, the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission continued to develop its institutional strength and to implement its work plan in five areas: monitoring and investigation, women's rights, children's rights, human rights education and transitional justice. It now has 10 offices and more than 300 staff. Major achievements included its establishment as a permanent body under the new Constitution; an extensive consultation exercise among the Afghan population on transitional justice; the joint Commission-UNAMA political rights verification campaign, which issued three public reports before the election on the conditions for the free exercise of political rights (the Commission was also an accredited election observer and monitored about 1,000 polling sites); successfully taking up high-profile cases; processing more than 100 complaints; and holding some 200 human rights education and training workshops. The Commission receives extensive institutional support from UNDP.

Gender

42. In certain areas of the country, strong social and cultural norms continue to limit women's public role. Conservative ideologues further deny women their rights. Vital health and educational services are unevenly and insufficiently available. The institutional mechanisms of the Government to effectively address these issues are still in formation. In addition, the capacity of the Ministry of Women's Affairs, especially at the middle-management level, is weak, and its visibility and effectiveness in the provinces very from region to region. Finally, the difficult security situation in the country is a major threat for women.

43. The maternal mortality rate in Afghanistan is 1,600 per 100,000 live births. Maternal health-care services are not equally distributed, and the majority of women, especially from rural areas, do not have access to essential obstetric care. Moreover, pregnant women, as well as children under five, are at high risk of contracting malaria.

44. At the same time, progress has been made to strengthen the position of women in the country. Women made up 20 per cent of the 502 Constitutional Loya Jirga delegates. The Constitution of Afghanistan, adopted in January 2004, firmly states

that men and women have equal rights. The Constitution, as noted above, also includes a number of provisions securing the political participation of women. In regard to the electoral process, 41 per cent of the 10.5 million Afghans who registered to vote were women. One woman ran for president and two others were vice-presidential candidates. At the Berlin conference, the Government of Afghanistan stated its commitment to increase the number of women in the civil service. Currently, 21 per cent of permanent government employees are women. The Ministry of Women's Affairs, with support from UNDP, is currently providing training and advocacy courses in gender rights for 11 other Government ministries.

III. Relief, recovery and reconstruction

A. Government administration

45. The underlying strategy of United Nations relief, recovery and reconstruction efforts since the signing of the Bonn Agreement has been to move from the direct implementation of projects to supporting the Government's own development plans. While the Afghan Government has a coherent vision for its post-war reconstruction, its capacity remains weak in terms of public administration, institutions and ability to extend its development plans to provincial governments as well as to deliver essential public services. Many provincial governments remain semi-autonomous in relation to the central Government, particularly with regard to the remittance of tax revenue and the implementation of national laws at the provincial level. Entrenched interests in the provinces have also been able to capture parts of the provincial governments and impede reform. The uncertain security situation and the unchecked development of a parallel and illicit narco-economy exacerbate this weakness and seriously challenge further development, both economic and institutional.

46. International support for Afghanistan's reconstruction was reaffirmed at the Berlin conference earlier this year. The conference attendees issued a declaration that strongly endorsed the Government's work plan. According to that plan, this fiscal year the Government will accelerate reforms in the following key areas: public administration, fiscal management, private sector development, economic and social development (through the preparation of the poverty reduction strategy paper), rule of law, human rights, gender, disarmament, security and counter-narcotics activities.

47. At the Berlin conference the Government also presented a long-term costing report entitled "Securing Afghanistan's Future". It provided a comprehensive calculation of the cost of key recovery and reconstruction targets. The report formed the basis for assistance requests and donor pledges at the conference. As noted in A/58/868-S/2004/634 (para. 55), the Berlin conference was followed by the Afghanistan Development Forum in Kabul, where the development budget and core budget were presented to donors. The core budget ($609 million) is now fully financed, and development expenditures will be more than $1 billion in 2005, mostly for the national priority programmes. In addition, new programmes are being developed for the urban sector, justice sector, private sector and skills development. The Government's capacity to manage information in a transparent and effective manner is also improving. International aid for the national development budget are being tracked by the Ministry of Finance. Despite progress, however, the bulk of

external assistance to Afghanistan still does not go through national budget channels. Nonetheless, the Berlin conference, the Afghan Development Forum and the Afghan calendar year 1383 development budget together represent a significant step forward in improving the planning and financing of reconstruction under government leadership.

48. Between May and October 2004, the United Nations country team, together with its partners from the Government, from the NGO and donor communities and from international financial institutions, conducted Afghanistan's first common country assessment — an in-depth analysis of the country's development challenges and their root causes. The common country assessment process covered four thematic areas: institutional development and governance; peace, security and justice; economic development and growth; and social well-being. These themes are key to helping Afghanistan achieve the Millennium Development Goals. The common country assessment will be closely aligned with the Government-led poverty reduction programmes, with the consultative group mechanism providing the main forum for consultation.

49. A vital tool for government administration, as well as reconstruction and development planning, is the national census. Afghanistan's last census was conducted in 1979, but not completed. A pre-census household listing began in October 2002 and is about to be completed, though fieldwork in four provinces has been delayed for reasons of poor security or difficult climate. Planning has nonetheless begun for the census itself, which is scheduled to be held over the course of 20 days in 2006. Currently, a planning team led by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) is in Kabul. A donors' conference will be held in December to seek funding to carry out the census.

B. Emergency response and development issues

50. This year marks the sixth year of below-average rainfall and snowfall in Afghanistan, exacerbating the chronic water shortage in the country. Vulnerable populations, totalling an estimated 4 million people, have been identified in localized pockets in at least 27 provinces. Especially vulnerable provinces include Ghor, Nimroz, Uruzgan, Paktika, Ghazni, Daikundi, Kandahar and Helmand. Their vulnerability stems from a combination of the loss of groundwater associated with diminished snowpacks and less rainfall. As a result, crop yields were reduced during the 2004 harvest and the cost of grain rose. There is some evidence of distress livestock sales and rising casual labour rates, suggesting that the drought has made farm life unsustainable for some. In the wider context, the drought may affect the agricultural mainstay of the economy and have a negative impact on economic growth. The Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development is leading the drought-response process, with support from UNAMA. In particular, an emergency appeal for $71 million covering the six-month period between September 2004 and February 2005 was issued. The response by donors to the appeal has been extremely positive, and the current shortfall amounts to roughly $9 million.

C. Agriculture

51. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has been supporting the rehabilitation and development of the agricultural sector. Specifically, FAO is assisting vulnerable farmers by improving food security and nutrition, ensuring sustainable management of natural resources, contributing to the generation of viable alternative livelihoods, and building capacity in the agricultural sector.

D. Health and nutrition

52. The dual challenge in the health sector is to expand national services and improve the quality of health care — preventive and curative — while remaining within the Government's recurring cost projections. In line with the strategy prepared by the Ministry of Health, UNICEF and other United Nations agencies, the international community is supporting the Government in rebuilding the primary health-care system. The overall strategy in 2004 has focused on prevention, improving subnational capacity, establishing health-network structures, strengthening outreach services and building partnerships with NGOs and the private sector. There has been a particular focus on obstetric care and reproductive and child health. Existing projects to support hospitals and other social institutions, control disease, respond to outbreaks and pre-position medical supplies are ongoing. Specific programmes to eradicate polio and maternal and neonatal tetanus, as well as other vaccination and immunization campaigns, are also continuing.

53. Tuberculosis remains a serious public health problem in Afghanistan. With support from the World Health Organization (WHO), 162 health facilities in the country are offering services in 141 districts that represent 54 per cent of the country's population. The treatment success rate was 86 per cent in 2002. Anti-tuberculosis medicines for 2004 and at least half of 2005 have been procured. These are sufficient to provide a full course of treatment to some 25,000 tuberculosis patients.

54. Under the Roll Back Malaria project, WHO is assisting the Ministry of Health and local health authorities to combat malaria in 14 provinces where the disease is endemic. Through this project, 600,000 individuals are receiving full treatment for malaria every year. In addition 750,000 individuals are protected from malaria and leishmaniasis by sleeping under insecticide-treated nets provided under the project.

E. Education

55. The reactivation of the national primary-education system has been an important success of the immediate post-conflict period. Building on this, the Government's strategic focus in 2004 has been on improving the quality and content of the education package. This involved significant support from UNICEF in teacher training and upgrading, the provision of school materials and the application of curriculum reform policies. UNICEF, with the Ministry of Education, distributed teaching and learning materials to 4.2 million schoolchildren and 74,466 teachers. Efforts are being made to ensure smoother and more consistent salary payments to teaching staff, and particular attention is being given to securing girls' access to

education outside of the main urban centres. The focus on developing the capacity of educational authorities in the provinces has intensified, which is similar to what has occurred in respect of other social services.

56. Thanks in part to these efforts, the net enrolment rate for Afghan children between 7 and 13 years of age has increased to 54 per cent (67 per cent for boys and 37 per cent for girls). A number of factors, however, such as distances to schools, the inadequacy of facilities and lack of separate schooling for boys and girls, continue to impede larger enrolment. To address this, UNICEF is supporting the establishment of community-based schools, especially for girls in villages where no formal schools are accessible. The first phase of this project is to establish 1,500 community schools for 75,000 girls and boys in those areas where girls' enrolment is below the national average. So far, the villages have been identified and the training for the provincial educational officials has been completed.

F. Media

57. Since the Bonn process began, the number of media outlets has expanded significantly. There are now 42 radio stations (25 non-State-run), 18 television stations (14 State-controlled) and some 300 print publications (daily, weekly and monthly). The quality of these media, particularly print publications, is very uneven. The sustainability of all media outlets is not guaranteed. Many non-State-run publications depend on grants, as the Afghan media market is not yet strong enough to allow outlets to sustain themselves on advertisements, and many consumers can purchase publications only at subsidized prices. International support for State-owned Radio-Television Afghanistan has resulted in the provision of new equipment, new studios and satellite facilities. UNAMA has been assisting with programme production and capacity-building as a means to supplement the efforts of other organizations.

58. The Government this year adopted a new media law that prohibits censoring or limiting mass media and affirms the rights to freedom of thought, speech and information. It also provides legal protection to journalists to exercise their profession and to protect their sources.

59. Before the election, NGOs, bilateral organizations, the United Nations and the secretariat of the Joint Electoral Management Body offered election-related training to Afghan journalists, as most of them had never covered an election. This included training on balanced and impartial coverage, "hate speech", electoral legislation and the media code of conduct.

G. Voluntary repatriation and reintegration

60. Between January and October 2004, some 740,000 individuals returned to Afghanistan under the voluntary and assisted repatriation programme supported by the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Of these, 370,000 came from Pakistan, 360,000 from the Islamic Republic of Iran and 10,000 from other countries. Since 2002, over 3 million people have returned voluntarily. The largest number of the returnees (43 per cent) went to the central region of Afghanistan, followed by those returning to the northern region (22 per cent) and the eastern region (20 per cent).

Kabul province remained the province receiving the largest number of returnees. A high percentage of returnees are landless (70 per cent), or claim not to have a house or shelter to return to (27 per cent).

61. Returns from the Islamic Republic of Iran have increased significantly relative to last year, largely as a result of measures put in place by its Government to encourage returns to Afghanistan. In Pakistan, some 80,000 persons returned from the "new camps" that were established after 11 September 2001. Those refugees who remained in Pakistan were relocated to other camps, and the new camps were closed by the end of September 2004.

62. Some 35,000 internally displaced persons were able to find a solution to their displacement either by returning to their places of origin or settling locally. However, security conditions in a number of provinces in the north and the central highlands still prevent the return of many internally displaced persons and refugees originating from these areas.

63. The reintegration assistance programme continued to focus on the construction of rural houses — a high-priority request from returnees — for the most vulnerable groups. An average of 15 to 20 per cent of returnees have benefited from this activity. Between 2002 and the end of 2004, UNHCR will have built some 120,000 houses, mostly in areas receiving large numbers of returnees. Lack of employment and slow progress in reconstruction in rural areas pose a continuing challenge to the sustainable reintegration of returnees. The increased number of returns to urban areas is placing an additional burden on the already stretched infrastructure capacity of major cities and highlights the need for the development of a social housing scheme.

64. Reports indicate that returnees did not face marked discrimination in terms of access to basic social services, though they experienced occupation or confiscation of their land and related abuses such as extortion, illegal taxation or forced recruitment. Beginning next year, UNHCR will work more intensively with the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission on return and human rights monitoring to enhance and expand the current returnee monitoring exercise.

H. Mine action

65. Under the direction of the Mine Action Consultative Group and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and with the support of Canada, the United Nations Mine Action Centre for Afghanistan is currently facilitating the process of transferring responsibility for mine action in Afghanistan from the United Nations to a national mine-action coordination agency. The Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan employs approximately 8,000 Afghan personnel and 22 international technical staff, in addition to 700 demobilized soldiers, making it one of the largest civilian employers in the country.

66. The strategic goal of the Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan is to remove the impact of mines and unexploded ordnance from all high-impact areas by 2007 and to make Afghanistan mine-impact-free by 2012. Since January 2003, 33 square kilometres of minefields and 69 square kilometres of battlefields have been cleared, and a total of 2,354,244 mines and pieces of unexploded ordnance have been destroyed. More than 650,000 returnees have received mine-risk education in

encashment and transit centres, and some 53,000 primary schoolteachers have been trained and provided with teaching materials. The number of mine victims has been reduced from approximately 150 a month in 2002 to less than 100 a month in 2004.

67. On 1 March 2003 Afghanistan became a State party to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. Afghanistan has made a firm commitment to clear all anti-personnel mines within 10 years, destroy all stockpiled anti-personnel mines by February 2007, provide mine-risk education to vulnerable groups and assist landmine survivors.

I. Infrastructure development

68. Rural infrastructure development, coordinated by the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development and supported by UNDP, is ongoing in all provinces and includes the construction of houses for returning refugees and internally displaced persons; road, school and clinic construction; agricultural development; and economic regeneration projects.

69. In collaboration with various technical ministries, the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) has implemented various projects to build roads, buildings, and irrigation works throughout the country, mainly under the Government's National Emergency Employment Programme. With funds from the World Bank and UNICEF, UNOPS infrastructure development activities in Afghanistan are designed to support the country's socio-economic recovery in the rural areas. UNOPS has adopted labour-intensive methods as a means of generating emergency employment opportunities for targeted vulnerable groups.

IV. Mission support

70. The integration of United Nations agencies continued to be facilitated by the United Nations Operations Centre in Afghanistan. UNOPS constructed additional office and warehousing facilities there, and WHO and UNFPA are constructing office buildings to be occupied by the end of 2004. With 84 beds, the complex now provides housing for United Nations Volunteers and others. A UNICEF warehouse was used to prepare 40,000 polling kits for the election. An international commercial bank opened inside the compound, reducing the need for United Nations staff to carry significant sums of cash.

71. A United Nations security assessment team, comprising representatives of the Office of the United Nations Security Coordinator, UNAMA and UNICEF, spent three weeks in Afghanistan in July 2004 and produced a report with 11 recommendations, all of which were endorsed by the Secretary-General, to integrate the security management structure in Afghanistan. Notably, the new security management structure included a Security Information and Operations Centre, which is located inside the United Nations Operations Centre compound, bringing together representatives from United Nations agencies, the Afghan Government, ISAF, the coalition and NGOs to coordinate responses to complex developments.

72. Medical care is an important part of staff security and safety. The UNAMA clinic in the Operations Centre compound was upgraded with laboratory, X-ray,

surgical and dental suites staffed by six doctors. In addition, a helipad has been completed to facilitate emergency treatment. All seven regions outside of Kabul have been provided with clinics and a full-time United Nations doctor.

73. UNOPS assumed responsibility for common services provided at the Operations Centre compound, and UNAMA co-located with the UNOPS regional operational centre in Dubai for the provision of operation services. The Dubai office and warehouse will also be used by UNAMA as a storage site for disaster-recovery services.

V. Observations

74. The political sphere during the period under review was dominated by the electoral process — the registration of 10.5 million voters and the holding of presidential elections on 9 October 2004. Despite significant challenges to these processes and some shortcomings in their implementation, the conduct of both exceeded expectations.

75. The general success of the electoral process is a result of many factors and the hard work of a variety of different people and organizations. Many of these — national and international security forces, donors, neighbouring countries, the United Nations and other organizations — have been mentioned already. In the end, however, the major reason for the success of the electoral process was the desire of the Afghan people themselves to ensure that it would succeed. They signed up willingly to carry out registration and to work the polling stations, and on polling day more than 8 million accepted the risk of attack to come out and vote. This is a decisive indication that the Bonn process, and the institutions that are being formed within it, have the backing of a large majority of the Afghan people.

76. The successful presidential election redeemed the difficult decision made by the Joint Electoral Management Body to separate presidential from parliamentary elections. The complexities avoided by postponing parliamentary elections allowed all actors to focus productively on carrying out the presidential elections as well as possible. Now it is vital that the international community help the Afghans to hold parliamentary elections next year, thereby fulfilling the commitment made in Bonn three years ago. The Joint Electoral Management Body has begun preparations for the parliamentary elections and will present a plan to donors and the international community shortly. UNAMA continues to advise and support the Joint Electoral Management Body in this task.

77. Fulfilling the spirit of the Bonn Agreement requires more than fulfilling the letter of its defined political process. In particular, much more needs to be achieved towards the fundamental goal of building the capacity of government at all levels and extending its authority to all parts of the country. This extension of authority is required in order to ensure the rule of law, the functioning of the legal economy, the practice of human and political rights and positive relations with neighbouring countries. This will require further progress on all five security sector reform items. The new Government, with the continued support of the international community, must address arms and narcotics — two issues that have the potential to combine and form a vicious cycle that could seriously undermine much of the progress made. The strong support provided by the people of Afghanistan to the newly elected President should help bring about significant progress on these fronts.

78. The gradual handing over of functions to the Afghan Government — for example, in the electoral field and in demining — is a positive indicator of developments made in the past three years. It is important that these functions be handed over to Afghan bodies with sufficient capacity to manage them. The overall policy direction, and the planning of reconstruction, has been successfully taken over by the Afghan Government. The pledges made at the Berlin conference for the Afghan Government's work plan are reassuring signs of the donor community's confidence in the Government in this regard and of the quality of the plans themselves. The international community will have to remain a key source of funding for Afghanistan's development for some years to come. At the same time, it is extremely important that the Afghan Government continue to implement its reforms, streamline the government apparatus and undertake concerted efforts to ensure that a culture of government corruption does not take root.

79. The year ahead will present many challenges to the political and economic recovery of Afghanistan. For the first time, however, Afghanistan will face these challenges with a directly elected President endowed with a strong popular mandate. The United Nations remains committed to assisting the new Government as it continues to address the vital tasks required to fulfil the letter and the spirit of the Bonn Agreement. The most important of these tasks have been outlined in the present report. The United Nations will rely on the cooperation and commitment of the lead nations for security sector reform, as well as donor support for implementing the Afghan Government's reconstruction work plan.

80. After a tense year fraught with risks, during which many issues — including social indicators and human rights — remained insufficiently addressed, it is a cause for hope and optimism that Afghans have embraced with such enthusiasm the transition to civilian, democratic rule. The large number of Afghans who have registered and voted, who continue to attend school and who have returned from exile to their country are as many rewards for the investment of the international community in the Bonn process and an encouragement to remain fully engaged.

81. In conclusion, I take this opportunity to thank my Special Representative and the men and women of UNAMA and its partner organizations for their outstanding efforts on behalf of Afghanistan, under difficult and dangerous conditions.